

VZCZCXR06410
OO RUEHLH RUEHPW
DE RUEHPW #0011/01 0141048
ZNY CCCCC ZZH

O 141048Z JAN 09
FM AMCONSUL PESHAWAR

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7806
INFO RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD IMMEDIATE 4592
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 1736
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI IMMEDIATE 1743
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI IMMEDIATE 1010
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL IMMEDIATE 1376
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA IMMEDIATE 0631
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE 0772
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE IMMEDIATE 0679
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO IMMEDIATE 0630
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA IMMEDIATE 0724
RUEAAIA/CIA WASHDC
RHMFIS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL
RHMFIS/CDR USSOCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUMICEA/USSOCOM INTEL OPS CEN MACDILL AFB FL
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR 4864

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PESHAWAR 000011

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 1/14/2019

TAGS: PTER MOPS PGOV PK PHUM

SUBJECT: CEASEFIRE ENDS 2-DAY SECTARIAN BATTLE IN HANGU

CLASSIFIED BY: Lynne Tracy, Principal Officer, Peshawar,
Department of State.

REASON: 1.4 (a), (b), (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) The district administration of Hangu, along with rival Sunni and Shi'a groups, signed a ceasefire agreement on January 11, putting a tenuous end to two days of sectarian fighting that killed 40 and injured more than 60 according to Ghulam Qadir, the FATA Secretary for Law and Order. The fighting started when Shi'as marched towards the Hangu bazaar for the Ashura procession. Despite the ceasefire, sporadic fighting continues around Hangu. The failure to prevent or effectively end clashes between Shi'as and Sunnis is an indicator of the current state of the police force and the growth of the sectarian divide.

Shi'as Angered When Ashura March Stopped

¶2. (C) According to Qadir, the fighting in Hangu started on January 9 after political authorities forbade but failed to prevent Shi'as from marching through Hangu bazaar in their Ashura mourning procession. Shi'as predominate in about 25 villages of upper Kohat, on the road from Kohat to Hangu. When the district administration of Hangu told hundreds of these Shi'as that the mourners' procession would not be allowed to take its usual route due to a curfew, the Shi'as began to protest and proceeded along the route. Fighting erupted with Sunnis in the area once the marchers ignored the political authorities and proceeded towards the bazaar. The bazaar, according to Qadir, was subsequently burned and destroyed by the Shi'as.

40 Killed; Dozens of Homes Destroyed

¶3. (C) Groups of Sunnis and Shi'as fought in and around the villages surrounding Hangu for two days. Hundreds of taliban militants supported Sunni groups, while members of the Turi tribe from bordering Kurram Agency supported Shi'a groups. At least 40 were killed and dozens of homes destroyed in the clashes. Qadir denied press reports that the Army, which had been sent to assist the police, had fired on the marchers. He claimed that had the marchers been fired upon by the army when

they first arrived in Hangu, they would have turned back and the wider sectarian clash would have been avoided.

Peace Uncertain

¶4. (C) The ceasefire did not convince warring sides to cease fighting, and sporadic violence continued on January 12 while helicopter gunships hovered over Hangu and heavily armed Pakistani troops patrolled the city's bazaar and set-up checkpoints. According to Qadir the current ceasefire has fallen short because the elders of the both communities are unable to control their respective groups. The police reportedly were outmanned and outgunned and took shelter when they were unable to deter the fighting. This battle was not unexpected. Previous years have seen clashes related to the processions, and Qadir predicted possible sectarian violence in Hangu during a meeting with post in late December.

Sectarian Violence Increasing

¶5. (C) Sectarian violence in Hangu has claimed hundreds of lives in the last two years. It has also been steadily increasing in Pakistan's northwest over the last several years. Aside from the sectarian battles in Kurram, in 2008, at least 127 people were reportedly killed and 205 injured in 51 cases of sectarian violence across the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP), according to press reports. By comparison, in 2007, 26 people were killed and 20 injured in 23 similar incidents. These numbers represent a dramatic increase from sectarian deaths in 2003, two killed; 2004, one killed; 2005, five killed; and 2006, 13 killed.

Comment

PESHAWAR 00000011 002 OF 002

¶6. (C) The inability of the police to prevent or effectively end the latest violence even with the assistance of the army is an indicator of the current state of the force and the recent growth of the sectarian divide.

TRACY